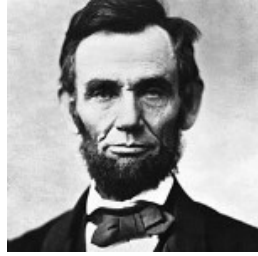


Precinct Organizing 101



"The whole state must be so well organized that every Whig can be brought to the polls. So divide the county into small districts and appoint in each a committee. Make a perfect list of the voters and ascertain with certainty for whom they will vote... Keep a constant watch on the doubtful voters and have them talked to by those in whom they have the most confidence... On Election Day see that every Whig is brought to the polls."
-- **Abraham Lincoln**, Letter to a friend, 1840

Precinct organizing really hasn't changed much since Abraham Lincoln wrote these instructions in 1840. The tools we use to keep track and communicate have changed but the basic concept is the same. We recruit volunteers to talk to voters and get them out to vote. Republicans do this well in most swing states like Ohio and Florida. The Democratic machines in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and Washington DC are known for good precinct organizing and Get Out The Vote efforts. This is what the Obama campaign did nationwide in 2008 and will likely repeat in 2012.

The precinct is the basic building block of every election and getting volunteers connected and talking to their neighbors is the most effective way to increase turn out and win elections.

Good precinct organizing is hard to do but it is not complicated. There are new tools that can make it easier to track what we do and communicate with our volunteers but the basic concepts of how to get our voters out to vote have not changed. When we are faced with hard work like recruiting volunteers and talking to voters, our natural reaction is to look for ways to avoid the hard work. We invent "new" and "improved" ways to appear to be doing something but not actually do the work.

Every year people come up with new ideas that sound good and fresh but are actually counterproductive and distracting. The real secret to the success of the 2008 Obama campaign was the discipline that was exerted, sticking to the plan and not getting distracted with every crazy idea that came along. Getting everyone on the same page and maintaining discipline is key.



"The most important job I ever had was Precinct Captain"
-- **Harry S Truman**

Effective precinct organizing has by far the most potential to increase votes and win elections. The basic idea is you recruit volunteers in each precinct who talk to nearby voters and identify people that are likely to vote for your candidates but may not be reliable voters. On election day, each volunteer is responsible for making sure about 20 of those unlikely voters gets to the poll to vote. This is also known as "Flushing." If you recruit 5 good volunteers in each precinct this can add up to about 100 extra votes per precinct. In a US Congressional district with 200 precincts, that's 20,000 extra votes, which will make the difference in most elections. The hardest part is applying this across many precincts and there is a great deal of work that goes into recruiting these volunteers and identifying these voters but this is the most effective and proven way to win elections.



"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."
-- **Barack Obama**

In 2008 the Barack Obama campaign attracted millions of new volunteers. Field organizers sorted out these volunteers by precinct and looked at where they had holes or gaps. For the last 3 months of the campaign thousands of field organizers across the country were focused on filling those holes so that on election day, every precinct in the United States had at least 10 volunteers to make sure Obama voters got to the polls to vote and this is how Obama won. For each election, the vote goal is different but the basic concept is the same. We recruit volunteers in every precinct to flush out our voters and make sure they vote.

5 x 20 GOTV

In a non Federal election year, the turn out will be much lower and our goal is to recruit 5 volunteers in each precinct to make sure 20 voters get to the polls that otherwise might not vote. That's 100 extra votes per precinct. In Fairfax County, with 230 precincts, that's 23,300 extra votes and if we can do this, we can win every election in Fairfax County in 2011. The hard part is getting everyone on the same page and maintaining the discipline needed to recruit the volunteers, talk to voters and get them out to vote.

Election Day Flushing

So, let's say I'm a precinct volunteer and I have my list of 20 people who are likely to vote Democratic but are not reliable voters and have not voted absentee. On the morning of election day, I begin calling these 20 people and ask if they have voted yet. The ones who say yes, I check off. The ones who say not yet, I ask them when they will be voting and let them know I will be calling back to check. The ones who do not answer, I leave a voicemail message reminding them to vote and letting them know I will be calling back. The ones who do not answer and do not have voicemail, I mark down to knock on their door. Once I get through the list of calls, I head out to the first home on my list and knock on their door to find out if they have voted. If there is no answer, I leave a message on their door, reminding them to vote, where to vote and the polling hours. I keep calling the other people on my list throughout the day, while I also visit each home on my list to knock on their door and talk in person or leave a message on their door. As I contact people and confirm they have voted, I check them off and keep working on my list until I've confirmed all have voted or until the polls close.

If you have just 4 other people in each precinct doing the same thing, that's about 100 extra votes per precinct. In a US Congressional district with 200 precincts, that's 20,000 extra votes and that will make the difference in most elections. Applying this approach across many precincts is very difficult. There is a great deal of hard work that goes into recruiting these volunteers and identifying your voters in each precinct but this is the basic concept. This is how we increase our vote and win elections. Getting everyone on the same page and maintaining discipline throughout the campaign is essential.

The numbers used here of 5 volunteers to contact 20 voters is a goal. You may be able to find 10 volunteers to work on a list of 10 voters or a group of 20 to each work on 5 voters. It will likely end up being some combination of these, with a few super volunteers who can take off work on election day and others who can work early in the morning and after work hours.

Next Steps

The first thing you will need to do to organize your precinct is obtain a list of strong Democrats in your precinct so you can begin calling and/or knock on their door to recruit them as volunteers.

[Votebuilder Basics - Creating a list of strong Democrats by precinct](#)